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312 Aguno I stopped to watch a couple of men stretching and
[281] scraping a cow hide. One of them called to a girl in the village, his wife or sister, to bring him some water to soften the skin. With great reluctance she brought a large bowlful and stood by, while with lavish hand the man splashed the precious water on skin and ground indiscriminately. He then demanded more and I thought, and hoped, that she would refuse; that she would remind him that she had walked eleven burning miles to bring the water that he threw away so thoughtlessly. After a moment's hesitation, however, she picked up the bowl he had thrown at her feet and turned slowly towards the hut, but as she did so I saw two tears overflow from her brimming eyes and roll down her cheeks. Such
[522] drudgery is forced on these womenfolk by circumstance and custom, and we can only wish that things were in some way bettered.

361 But now let us proceed and see what a Shilluk village is
[487] like. We enter it along a little path which leads from the main road and passes through the dried up, yellow stubble of last season's millet plantation.

Passing through the space between the fences of two
[367] neighbouring homesteads, we come upon a large level
[535] circle of bare ground which is the playground of the village and its dancing floor. Sometimes it boasts a tree, green and leafy in contrast to its dun, dusty surroundings, under the refreshing shade of which the village elders gather to discuss
[521] the affairs of their little world: the price of cattle, the failure of the harvest, the prospect of the fishing. Under the tree, too,
[534] or at the further side of the dancing floor, are two large forked stakes driven into the ground to hold the drums. Around this circular central space the family dwellings are grouped.

[621] Villages vary in size, from the small hamlet consisting of two or three homesteads to a large settlement of sixty or seventy. An average-sized village contains about thirty families. All, however, are set up on the same plan, and the houses are built according to the same pattern. Each house-
351 hold consists of two houses set facing one another in a small

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574 [270] like bellows, and then passes it on. Pipe and beer circulate freely, and under the mellowing influence of both, tongues are quickly loosened and conversation turns to the perennial [521] topic of cattle. After a while, your cigarette finished, you will excuse yourself to your host and, rising from your cramped position, greet everyone present in turn and make your escape into the open air.

512 The Shilluk, sensible man, starts his day with the sun. He emerges from his hut, however, with heavy head and blood-[513] shot eyes, since he has been sleeping for seven or eight hours in a small windowless hut with the doorway blocked with a [372] heavy grass mat and perhaps a smoky fire burning as a 825 protection against mosquitoes. As a further defence against [751] these pests he covers himself from head to foot with the red ashes from the cow-dung fire, but this does not worry him; [515] if there is water handy he may rinse his hands and face, if not, he will remain as he is until his next visit to the river —perhaps today, perhaps tomorrow or the next day—gives him the chance of taking a bath.

Gradually the village comes to life: the women appear, winding their drab-looking cloths round them, and set off [484] on their daily pilgrimage to the river with the heavy water pots balanced on their heads. The little group breaks up and the women fall into line, one behind the other, as they reach the narrow track leading out of the village, chattering like starlings as they swing along. The boys come out of the 512 byre smothered like their elders in the red ashes in which 857 they have been lying all night, looking like imps from the [233] lower regions. They begin to clean up round the tethered 372 cattle, collecting the cow dung and spreading it out to [234] dry in the sun for fuel. When this is done they milk the [252] cows and goats. From one compound comes the sound of dull thumping as some girl pounds the millet grain into coarse flour. The grain is small and hard, red or white in colour. It is first winnowed by being poured at shoulder height from a basket and then sieved in a boat-[415] shaped scoop of plaited fibre. The grain is then put into a

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763 *797 lying right across the entrance. It was poor Rachael who had been stretched out across the threshold where anyone entering the hut could not fail to step on or fall over her. [521] Sitting against the wall opposite the entrance were four ancient-looking hags who were simply passing the time away in gossip whilst waiting for the old woman to die. When I made my undignified entrance, one of the unlovely quartette, Rachael's daughter, said, 'Get up, Rachael. Here's the Father and he has brought you a burying cloth.' Said I, 'I haven't brought a burying cloth.' Chorus from the four beauties: 'He hasn't brought a cloth, Rachael; don't get up.' To me, 'What have you brought?' 'I have come to give her a blessing.' 'Oh! He's come to give you a blessing, Rachael; don't get up.' At this point poor Rachael dimly understood that someone had come to give her something, so she asked me to put it in her hand and not let the others get it.

I thought that I had better get on with the good work, and blessing the hut and Rachael with holy water, I began to recite the Litany of the Dying. Half-way through, there was an interruption from the daughter: '*Jal duong*'—a [514] pause whilst she spits, across Rachael and through the doorway; a good ten feet.

Myself: 'What?'

Daughter: '*Yi bi.*'

[576] This normal Shilluk greeting often comes, not when first meeting a person, but halfway through the conversation or visit. I said something more than my prayers, while the four resumed their gossip and spitting.

Daughter: '*Jal duong, Jal duong.*'

Myself: 'All ye Holy Virgins and Widows—Shut up.'

Daughter: 'O-oh! He says: "Shut up," and I was going to tell him that I went to the Sister to tell her that my mother was dying and to ask for a cloth to bury her in.'

At length, without further interruption I finished the prayers for the Dying, and gave poor Rachael one final blessing and prepared to depart. The four beldams followed me out of the hut, and the following conversation resulted: